



OFFICE of the ATTORNEY GENERAL  
GREG ABBOTT

May 27, 2003

Ms. Amanda Crawford  
Assistant Attorney General  
Public Information Coordinator  
Office of the Attorney General  
P.O. Box 12548  
Austin, Texas 78711-2548

OR2003-3557

Dear Ms. Crawford:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID#.

The Office of the Attorney General (the "OAG") received a request for various categories of information related to the Texas Tobacco litigation. You indicate that the request was subsequently narrowed to exclude information that has been previously addressed by the Open Records Division. *See, e.g.*, Open Records Letter Nos. 02-1862 (2002), 99-3218 (1999), 99-2626 (1999), 99-2372 (1999), 99-2362 (1999), 99-2310 (1999). Although you state that some of the responsive information will be made available, you claim that the remaining information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.103, 552.107, and 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and have reviewed the submitted sample records.<sup>1</sup>

Section 552.103, the litigation exception, provides in relevant part as follows:

- (a) Information is excepted from [required public disclosure] if it is information relating to litigation of a civil or criminal nature to which the state or a political subdivision is or may be a party or to which an officer or employee of the state or a political subdivision, as a consequence of the person's office or employment, is or may be a party.

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<sup>1</sup>We assume that the "sample" records submitted to this office are truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach and, therefore, does not authorize the withholding of any other requested records to the extent that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

....

(c) Information relating to litigation involving a governmental body or an officer or employee of a governmental body is excepted from disclosure under Subsection (a) only if the litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated on the date that the requestor applies to the officer for public information for access to or duplication of the information.

Gov't Code § 552.103(a), (c). The OAG has the burden of providing relevant facts and documents to show that the section 552.103(a) exception is applicable in a particular situation. The test for meeting this burden is a showing that (1) litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated on the date that the request for information was received, and (2) the information at issue is related to that litigation. *University of Tex. Law Sch. v. Texas Legal Found.*, 958 S.W.2d 479, 481 (Tex. App.—Austin 1997, no pet.); *Heard v. Houston Post Co.*, 684 S.W.2d 210, 212 (Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist.] 1984, writ ref'd n.r.e.); Open Records Decision No. 551 at 4 (1990). The OAG must meet both prongs of this test for information to be excepted under 552.103(a).

You state, and submit documentation showing, that the requested records relate to litigation that is currently pending before the 280<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court of Harris County, Texas. After reviewing your arguments and the submitted documents, we agree that the requested records relate to this litigation and may, therefore, be withheld from disclosure under section 552.103(a).

In reaching this conclusion, however, we assume that the opposing parties to the litigation have not previously had access to the information at issue. Once information has been obtained by all parties to the litigation through discovery or otherwise, no section 552.103(a) interest exists with respect to that information. Open Records Decision Nos. 349 (1982), 320 (1982). Further, the applicability of section 552.103(a) ends once the litigation has been concluded. Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982); Open Records Decision No. 350 (1982). Because we are able to make a determination under section 552.103, we need not address the applicability of your additional arguments against disclosure.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the

governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

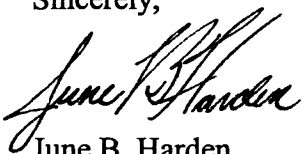
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "June B. Harden", is written over a horizontal line.

June B. Harden  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

JBH/seg

Ref: ID# 181640

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. Marc Murr  
Law Offices of Marc D. Murr  
5306 Irvington Street  
Houston, Texas 77006  
(w/o enclosures)